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Remarks and Messages

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For the Pantagraph: Annual Report

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For the Pantagraph: Annual Report

“Larger enrollment sign of good things at Illinois Wesleyan”

Although the past two years have been filled with many economic challenges, I am pleased to report that Illinois Wesleyan has made the necessary adjustments and is positioned well for the future. There are several reasons for such optimism.

It starts with students; we enrolled the largest and one of the most talented classes in our history last fall. This brought total enrollment to 2,075, which exceeded our target by 10 percent. Equally important is that 96 percent of our students from fall returned for the spring semester. I have reported on more than one occasion that students have plenty of options these days, and they often vote with their feet. These enrollment and retention numbers speak volumes about how our students feel about the university and the Bloomington-Normal community.

Second, through careful financial planning and shared sacrifices in many areas, the university ended 2010 in the black and projects similar results for 2011 and 2012. One contributing factor is the significant recovery of our endowment, thanks to improvement in the stock market and appreciation in the value of farm properties that have been gifted to us over the years. Earnings from the endowment and annual gifts to the university account for about 15 percent of our operating revenues each year and are the primary sources of financial assistance to students.

Third, the success of the "Transforming Lives" fundraising campaign is critical to our positive outlook about the future. Contrary to national trends in higher education, gifts from our alumni and friends continue to grow. Support for Illinois Wesleyan is nowhere more evident than right here in McLean County. Three recent examples of gifts from local residents include the Joslin Atrium addition to Memorial Center, the main dining and meeting facility on campus; the Byron S. Tucci Endowed Professorship; and the Vince Beggs Scholarship Funds.

And finally, we continue to see evidence of the many ways the university contributes to the quality of life in this community and region. One can trace that commitment to our first president, Clinton W. Sears, who said he would only accept the position on the condition that a "substantial sidewalk" be constructed linking the campus and downtown Bloomington. Sears even agreed to spend \$500 of his own money to build that sidewalk. A few illustrations of current contributions being made by IWU people include:

- University librarian Karen Schmidt sits on the Bloomington City Council; graduates Cheryl Gaines and Jason Chambers serve on the Normal Town Council; and alumni Scott Black and Don Cavallini are county board members.
- Professor Pam Muirhead serves on the board of the McLean County Museum of History and Professor Steve Eggleston serves as musical director of the IWU Civic Orchestra, which he founded 25 years ago.

- Alumni named recently to key leadership positions in local businesses include Jeff Solberg, a 1974 graduate, who is the new chief executive officer at Growmark, and Steve Czirjak, class of 1993, appointed chief financial officer for Afni.

Since its founding in 1850, Illinois Wesleyan has had much to celebrate, from the vitality of its academic programs and excellence of its faculty to the quality of its students and its strong relationships with the community. All remain as important to our future as they have been to our past.

Wilson is president of Illinois Wesleyan University.

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